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(54) **PROCESS AND VESSEL FOR REMOVING ONE OR MORE SULFUR COMPOUNDS**

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C10G 21/08 (2006.01)

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2300/202 (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

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2300/202; C10G 2300/1037

See application file for complete search history.

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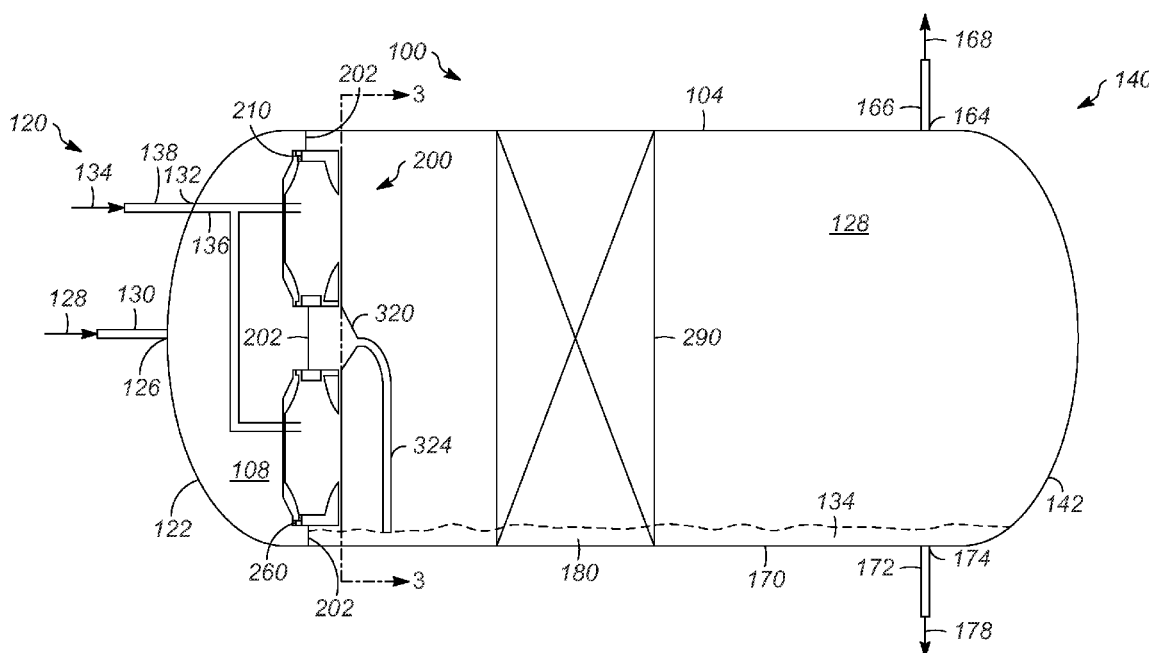
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

One exemplary embodiment can be a process for removing one or more sulfur compounds from a first liquid. The process can include passing the first liquid through a first inlet and a second liquid through a second inlet, and passing the first liquid through a first outlet and the second liquid through a second outlet of a vessel. The vessel may further have a plurality of vortex contactors. Often, the plurality of vortex contactors has a first vortex contactor, in turn including at least one wall and a frustum. The at least one wall can form a perimeter about an interior space and include a first side and a second side forming a passageway communicating the first liquid from an exterior to the interior space, and a frustum positioned proximate to the passageway and abutting the at least one wall for facilitating contacting of the first and second liquids to extract the one or more sulfur compounds from the first liquid to the second liquid.

10 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



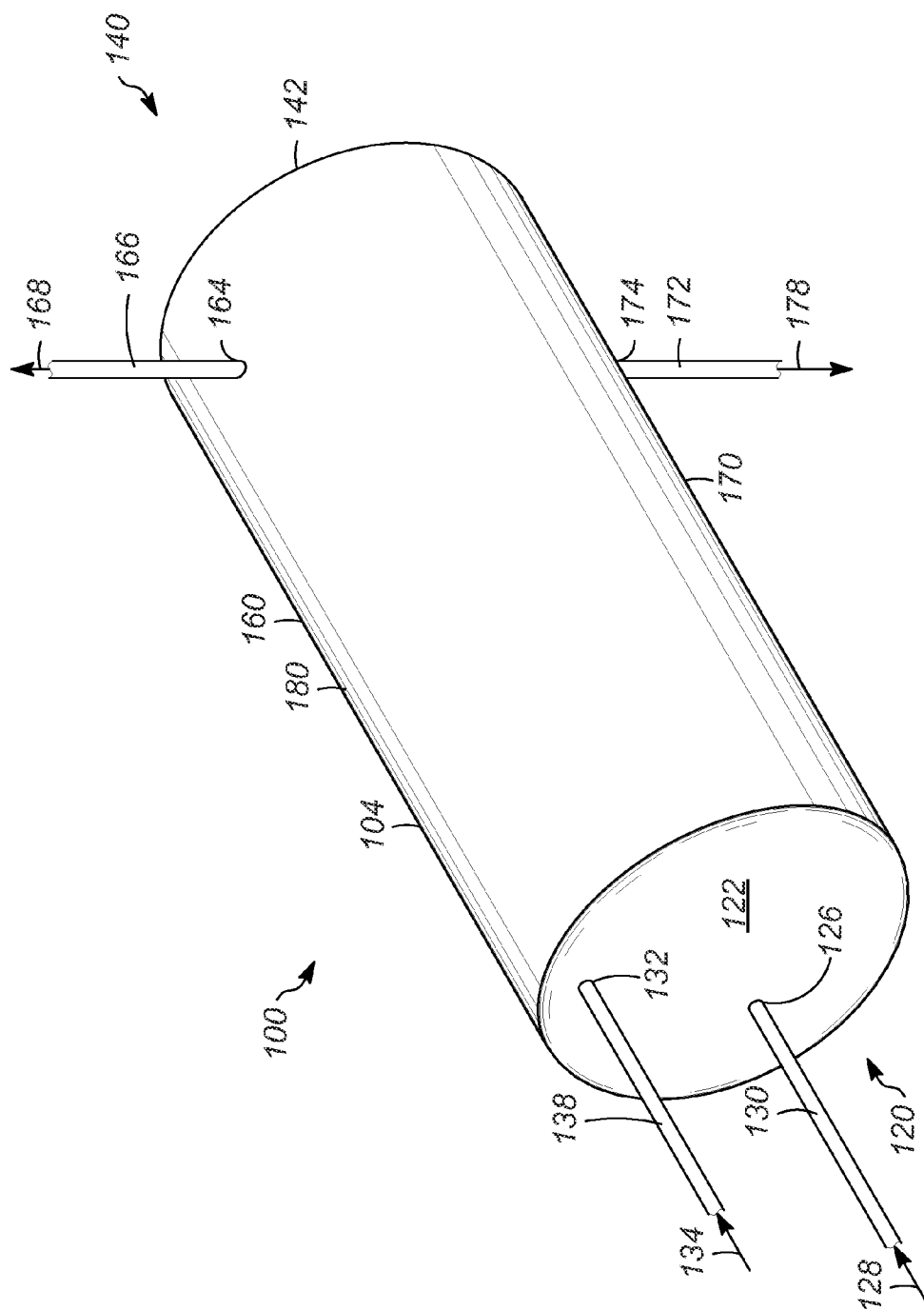


FIG. 1

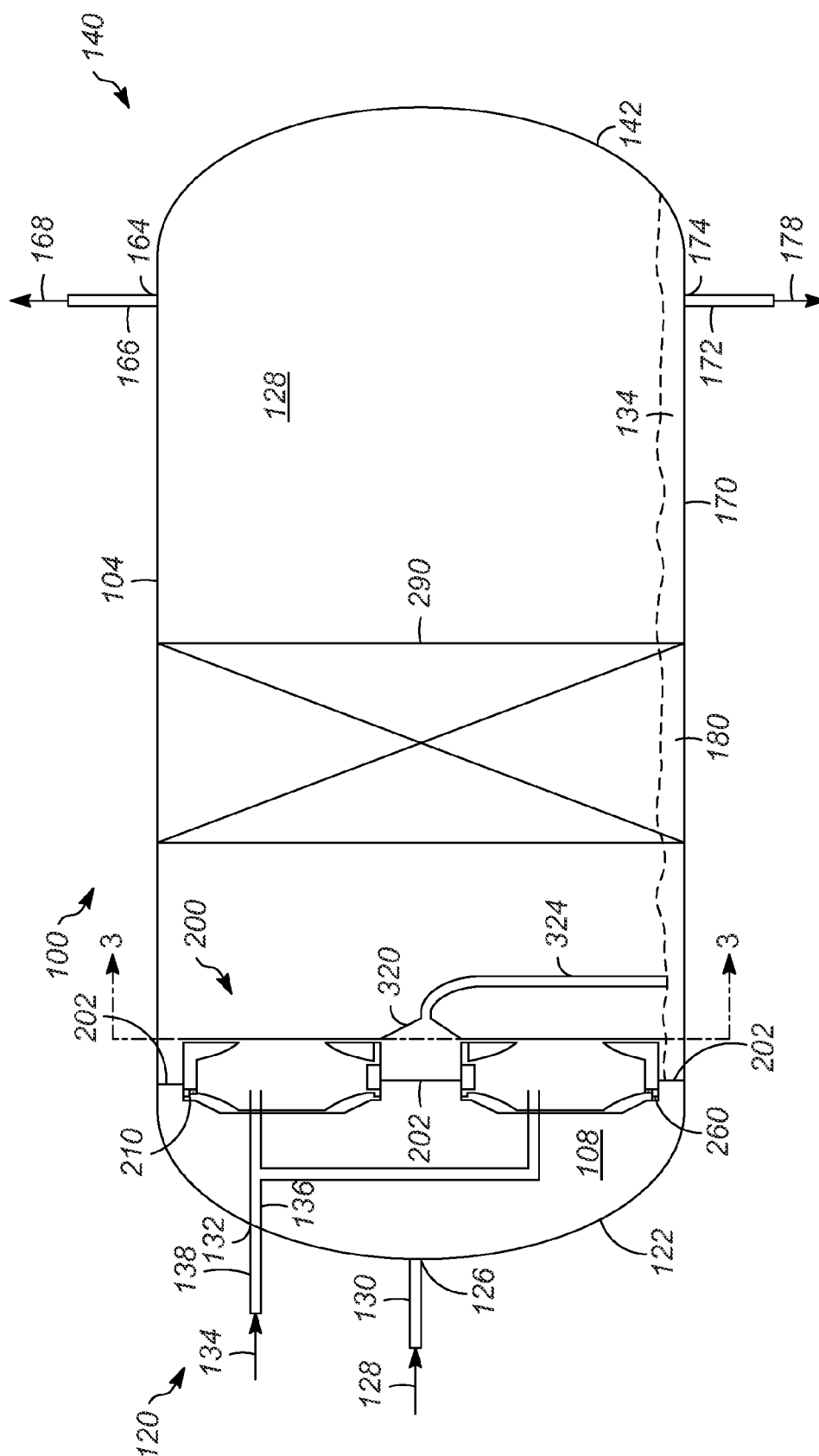
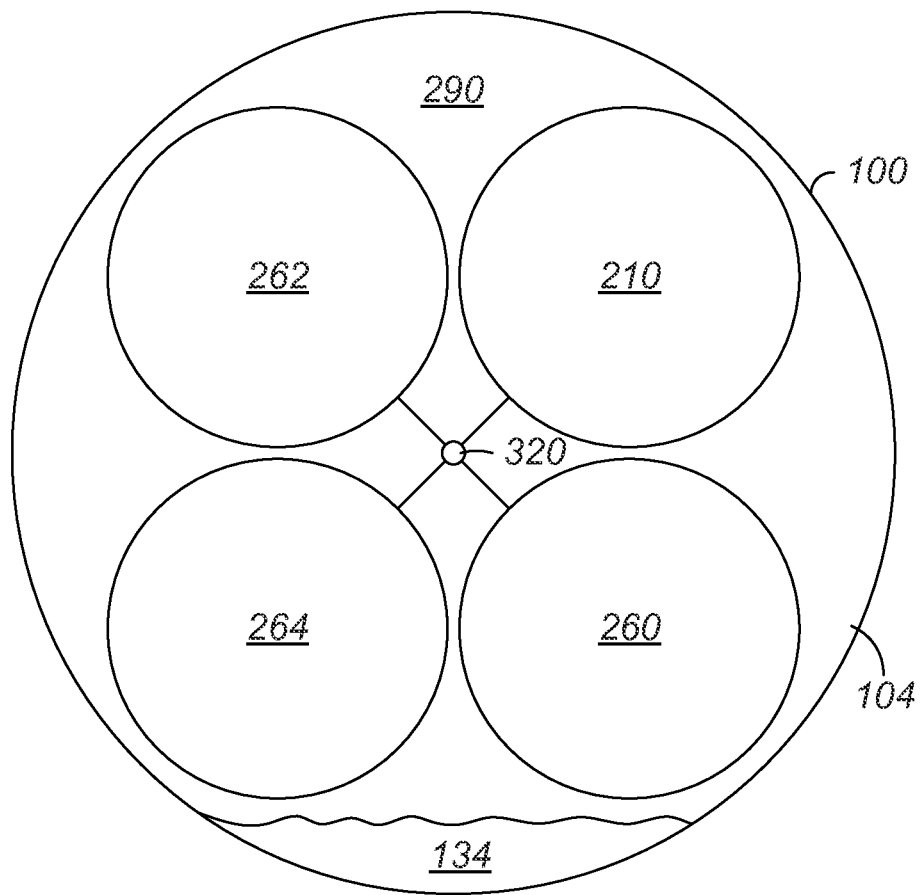


FIG. 2

**FIG. 3**

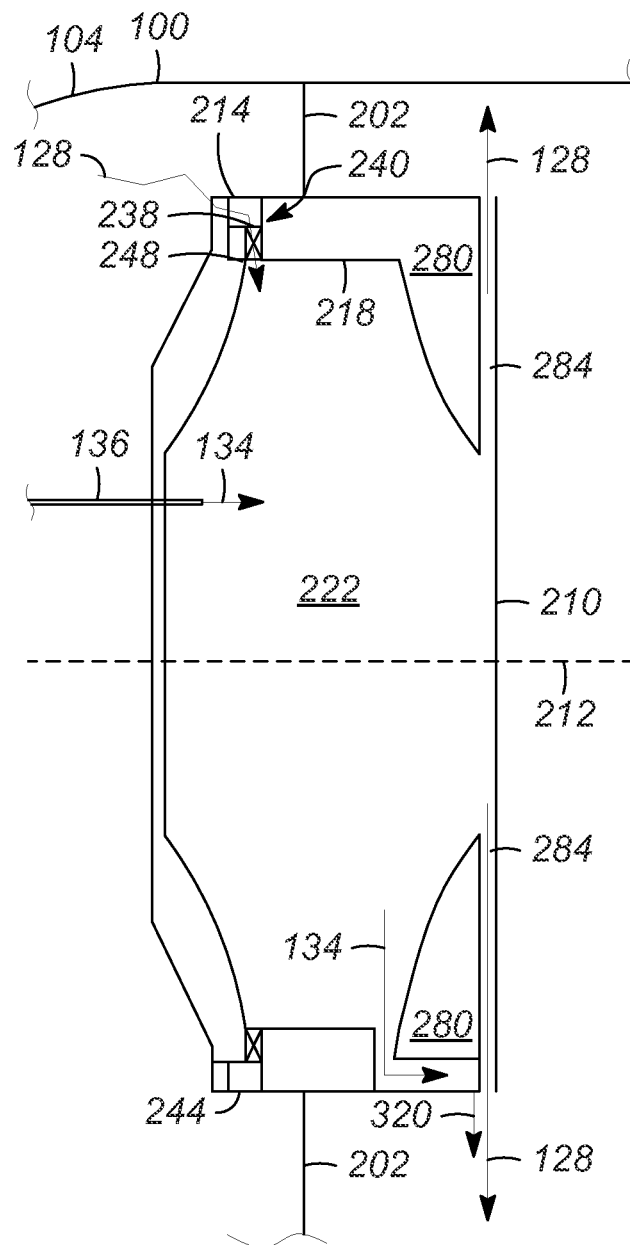


FIG. 4

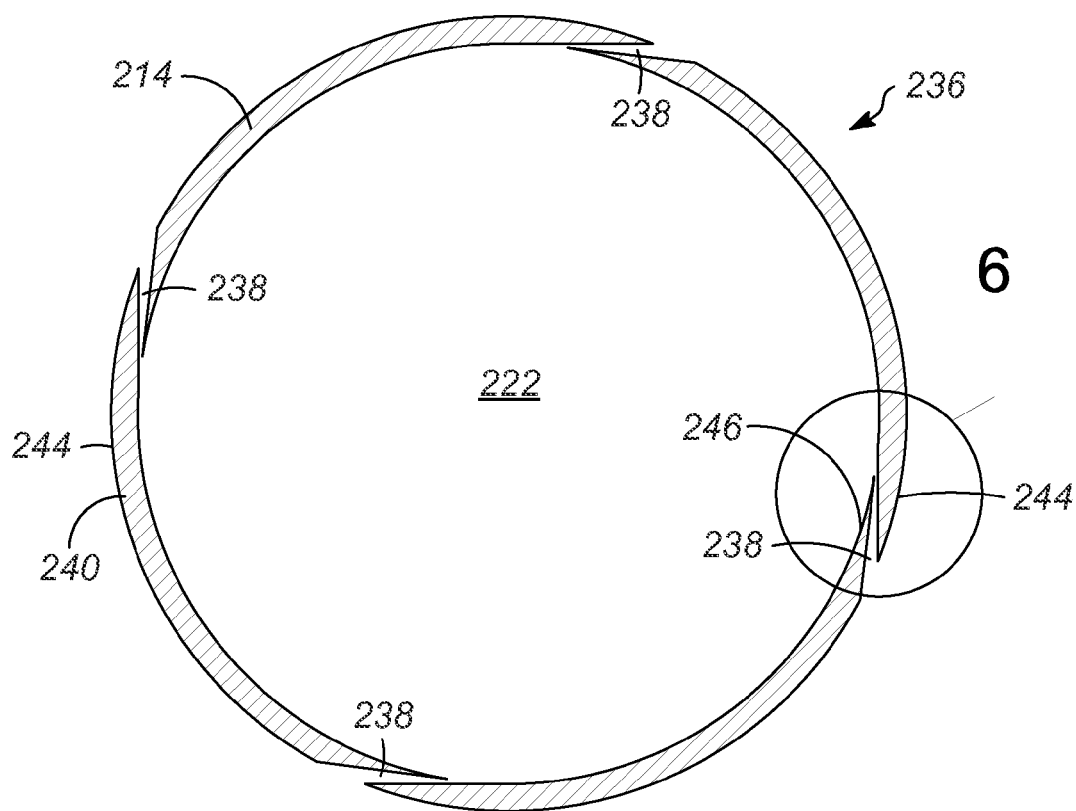


FIG. 5

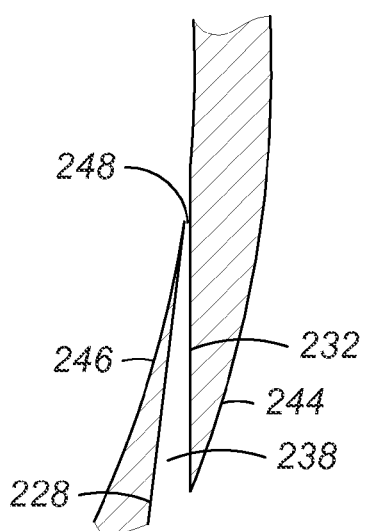


FIG. 6

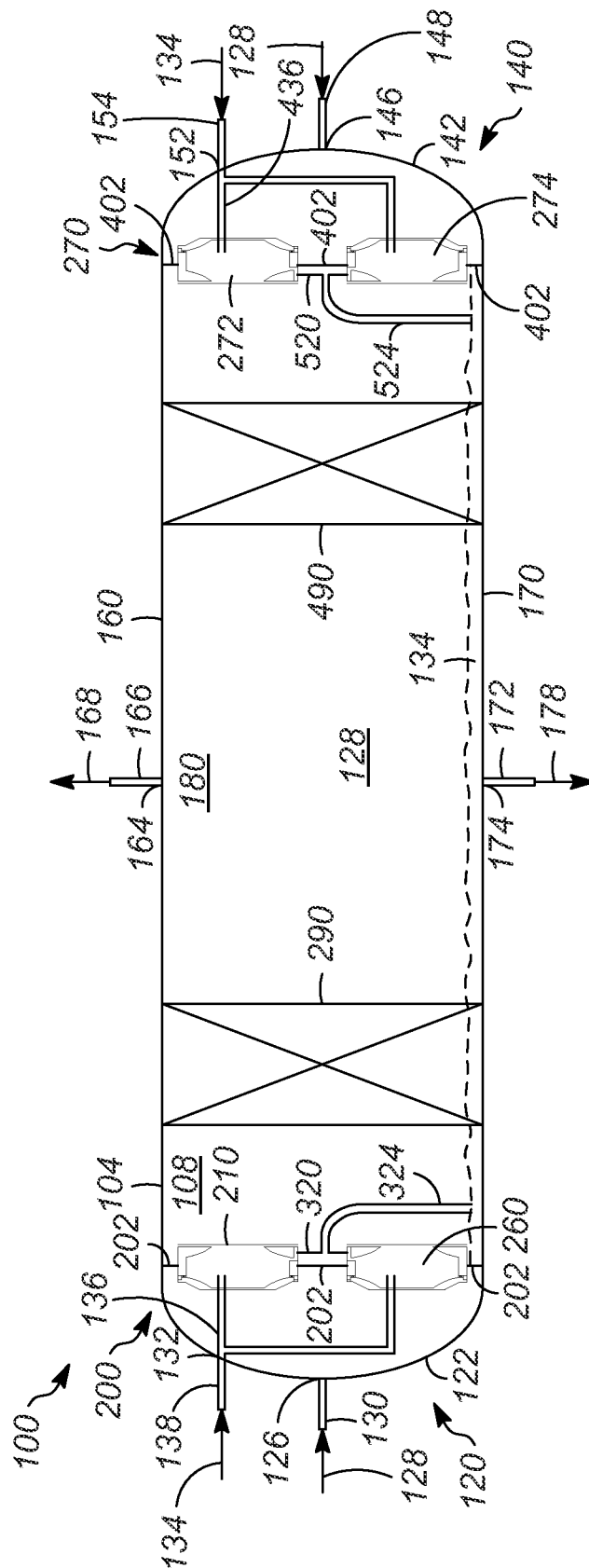


FIG. 7

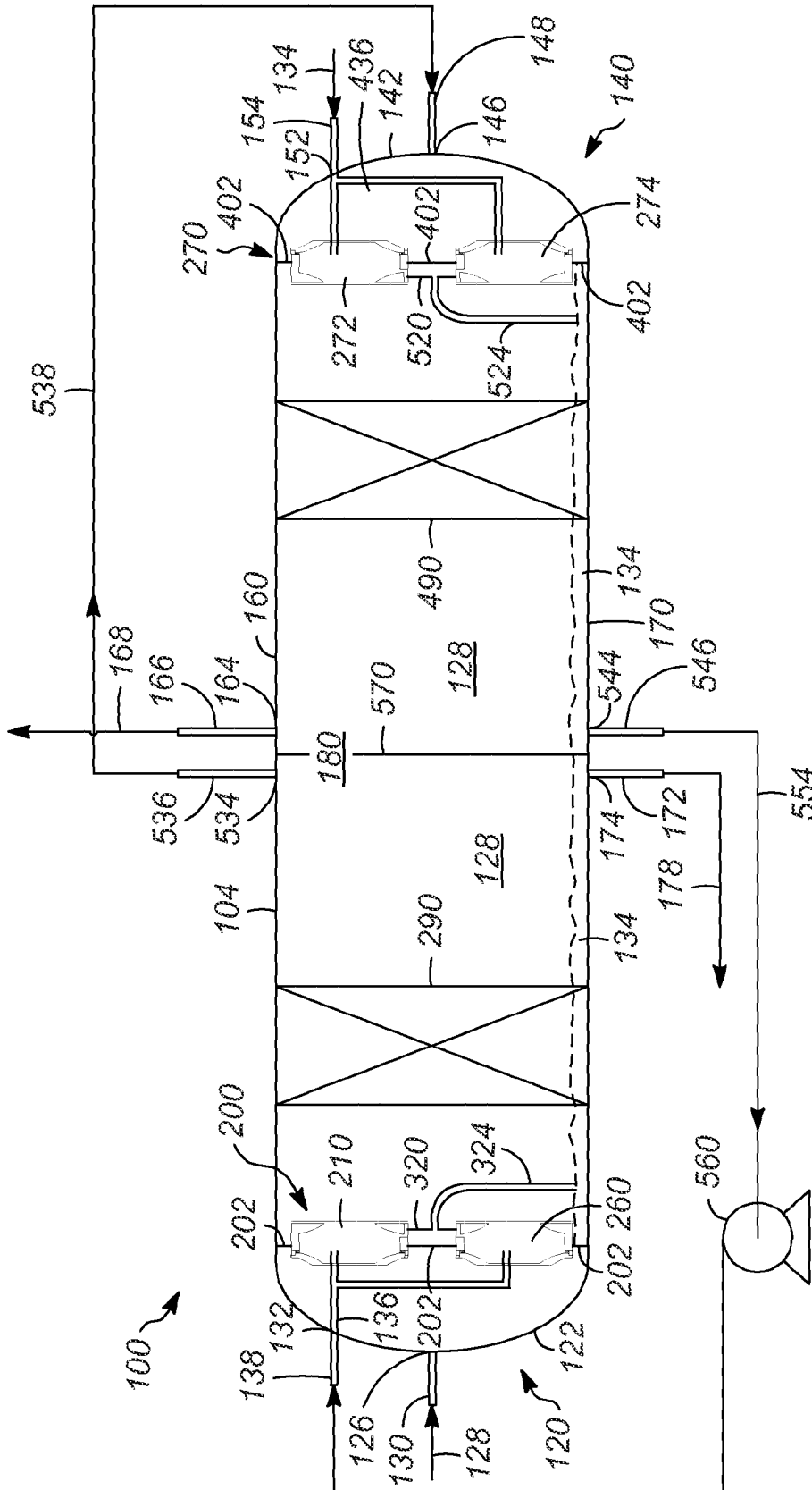


FIG. 8

1

PROCESS AND VESSEL FOR REMOVING ONE OR MORE SULFUR COMPOUNDS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention generally relates to a process and vessel for removing one or more sulfur compounds.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

Current industry practice to extract one or more mercaptan compounds from a hydrocarbon stream can use a water-based caustic solvent. Often, the hydrocarbon stream and the caustic solvent are mixed and then the hydrocarbon and aqueous phases are separated by settling or decanting. The mixing and phase separation operations may be done in a stage wise manner typically involving mechanically or hydraulically-driven intimate mixing of the two phases followed by a settling stage. Generally, the settling stage requires a large vessel volume, such as a large diameter and a tangent length, to allow the dispersed phase to coalesce and separate from the continuous phase under near stagnant conditions. Usually, this large volume minimizes the entrainment or carryover of the dispersed phase in the continuous phase as it exits the settling volume.

Alternatively, a vertically oriented column with multiple stages of contacting trays for liquid-liquid extraction of primarily mercaptan sulfur contaminants from one or more hydrocarbons may use caustic as a solvent in a counter-current flow configuration. Typically, the last tray before the treated hydrocarbon exits the column is followed by a disengaging distance for gravity-aided coalescing/settling of caustic, often followed by wire mesh packing or other coalescing media that can provide the fine coalescing/separation of two immiscible liquids. The packing, in turn, is usually followed by an additional disengaging volume to allow for further separation of caustic from hydrocarbons.

Another approach for separating caustic from hydrocarbon may utilize a non-dispersive contacting device, such as a fiber film contactor, for extraction followed by a horizontal settler that allows for further separation of caustic from hydrocarbon primarily from droplet coalescence and gravity settling.

The use of a mixer-settler device may be amenable to modular supply because the contacting device usually does not require extra ordinary field erection equipment. However, such mixer-settler devices may fail to achieve the required phase mixing and phase separation. Thus, it is desirable to obtain a device that obtains the required phase mixing and separation while minimizing the number and size of vessels to facilitate transportation and installation.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One exemplary embodiment can be a process for removing one or more sulfur compounds from a first liquid. The process can include passing the first liquid through a first inlet and a second liquid through a second inlet, and passing the first liquid through a first outlet and the second liquid through a second outlet of a vessel. The vessel may further have a plurality of vortex contactors. Often, the plurality of vortex contactors has a first vortex contactor, in turn including at least one wall and a frustum. The at least one wall can form a perimeter about an interior space and include a first side and a second side forming a passageway communicating the first liquid from an exterior to the interior space, and a frustum positioned proximate to the passageway and

2

abutting the at least one wall for facilitating contacting of the first and second liquids to extract the one or more sulfur compounds from the first liquid to the second liquid.

Another exemplary embodiment can be a vessel for removing one or more sulfur compounds. The vessel can include a substantially cylindrical shell having a first end, a second end, a top, and a bottom, and a plurality of vortex contactors positioned within the substantially cylindrical shell. Usually, the plurality of vortex contactors includes a first vortex contactor, in turn having at least one wall and a frustum. The at least one wall can form a perimeter about an interior space and have a first side and a second side forming a passageway communicating at least one of the first and second liquids from an exterior to the interior space, and a frustum positioned proximate to the passageway and abutting the at least one wall for facilitating contacting of the first and second liquids.

A further exemplary embodiment can be a process for counter-current contacting of a first liquid and a second liquid. The process may include passing the first liquid through a first end of a vessel, passing the second liquid through a second end of the vessel, passing the first liquid through a first plurality of vortex contactors, collecting the contacted first liquid, providing the contacted first liquid to the second end of the vessel, and passing the contacted first liquid through a second plurality of vortex contactors. Generally, the first plurality of vortex contactors can include a vortex contactor, in turn having at least one wall forming a perimeter about an interior space and including a first side and a second side forming a passageway communicating the first liquid from an exterior to the interior space for contacting the second liquid. The second plurality of vortex contactors may include another vortex contactor, in turn having at least one wall forming a perimeter about an interior space and including a first side and a second side forming a passageway communicating the first liquid from an exterior to the interior space.

The embodiments disclosed herein can provide a compact device amenable to modular supply by utilizing vortex contacting. One exemplary embodiment is a horizontally oriented vessel housing internals designed to extract one or more sulfur compounds from a hydrocarbon stream by contact with an alkaline, aqueous solvent. The horizontal orientation can facilitate modular equipment supply and minimizing erecting equipment in the field. The embodiments herein can significantly reduce the total overall cost of equipment and facilitate modular supply and installation at site.

DEFINITIONS

As used herein, the term "stream" can include various hydrocarbon molecules, such as straight-chain, branched, or cyclic alkanes, alkenes, alkadienes, and alkynes, and optionally other substances, such as gases, e.g., hydrogen, or impurities, such as heavy metals, and sulfur and nitrogen compounds. The stream can also include aromatic and non-aromatic hydrocarbons. Moreover, the hydrocarbon molecules may be abbreviated C1, C2, C3 . . . Cn where "n" represents the number of carbon atoms in the one or more hydrocarbon molecules. Furthermore, a superscript "+" or "-" may be used with an abbreviated one or more hydrocarbons notation, e.g., C3⁺ or C3⁻, which is inclusive of the abbreviated one or more hydrocarbons. As an example, the abbreviation "C3⁺" means one or more hydrocarbon molecules of three carbon atoms and/or more. In addition, the term "stream" may be applicable to other fluids, such as

aqueous and non-aqueous solutions of alkaline or basic compounds, such as sodium hydroxide.

As used herein, the terms “hydrocarbon feed” and “hydrocarbon stream”, and “alkaline stream” may also be referred to as, respectively, a “hydrocarbon liquid” and an “alkaline liquid”.

As used herein, the term “zone” can refer to an area including one or more equipment items and/or one or more sub-zones. Equipment items can include one or more reactors or reactor vessels, heaters, exchangers, pipes, pumps, compressors, and controllers. Additionally, an equipment item, such as a reactor, dryer, or vessel, can further include one or more zones or sub-zones.

As used herein, the term “rich” can mean an amount of generally at least about 50%, and preferably about 70%, by mole, of a compound or class of compounds in a stream. If referring to a solute in solution, e.g., one or more thiol compounds in an alkaline solution, the term “rich” may be referenced to the equilibrium concentration of the solute. As an example, about 5%, by mole, of a solute in a solvent may be considered rich if the concentration of solute at equilibrium is 10%, by mole.

As used herein, the term “substantially” can mean an amount of generally at least about 80%, preferably about 90%, and optimally about 99%, by mole, of a compound or class of compounds in a stream. If referring to a solute in solution, e.g., one or more thiol compounds in an alkaline solution, the term “substantially” may be referenced to the equilibrium concentration of the solute. As an example, about 8%, by mole, of a solute in a solvent may be considered substantial if the concentration of solute at equilibrium is 10%, by mole.

As used herein, the term “frustum” can mean a solid figure formed when a plane, which is substantially parallel to a base or a top of a cone, a pyramid, and a funnel, sections the shape. With respect to the term “funnical frustum”, the sectioning plane can pass through a conical portion of the funnel and be substantially parallel to another plane perpendicular to the mouth of the funnel.

As used herein, the term “coupled” can mean two items, directly or indirectly, joined, fastened, associated, connected, or formed integrally together either by chemical or mechanical means, by processes including stamping, molding, or welding. What is more, two items can be coupled by the use of a third component such as a mechanical fastener, e.g., a screw, a nail, a staple, or a rivet; an adhesive; or a solder.

As used herein, the term “mercaptan” means thiol and can include compounds of the formula RSH as well as salts thereof, such as mercaptides of the formula $RS-M^+$ where R is a hydrocarbon group, such as an alkyl or aryl group, that is saturated or unsaturated and optionally substituted, and M is a metal, such as sodium or potassium.

As used herein, the term “disulfides” can include dimethyldisulfide, diethyldisulfide, and ethylmethyldisulfide, and possibly other species having the molecular formula $RSSR'$ where R and R' are each, independently, a hydrocarbon group, such as an alkyl or aryl group, that is saturated or unsaturated and optionally substituted. Typically, a disulfide is generated from the oxidation of a mercaptan-tainted caustic and forms a separate hydrocarbon phase that is not soluble in the aqueous caustic phase. Generally, the term “disulfides” as used herein excludes carbon disulfide (CS_2).

As used herein, the weight percent or ppm of sulfur, e.g., “wppm-sulfur” is the amount of sulfur in a hydrocarbon stream, and not the amount of the sulfur-containing species unless otherwise indicated. As an example, methylmercap-

tan, CH_3SH , has a molecular weight of 48.1 with 32.06 represented by the sulfur atom, so the molecule is about 66.6%, by weight, sulfur. As a result, the actual sulfur compound concentration can be higher than the wppm-sulfur from the compound. An exception is that the disulfide content in caustic can be reported as the wppm of the disulfide compound.

As used herein, the term “g-force” can be abbreviated “g” and mean the angular acceleration imparted to a liquid and can be in units of meter per second squared (abbreviated m/s^2). One “g” can equal $9.8 m/s^2$.

As used herein, the terms “intermediate” or “spent” can mean that at least some of the capacity of a second liquid for extracting compounds, such as sulfur compounds, can be at least partially impeded by at least partial saturation by the compounds, or can mean a first liquid being at least partially extracted of the compounds.

As used herein, the term “parts per million” may be abbreviated herein as “ppm” and be based on weight.

As used herein, the term “kilopascal” may be abbreviated “KPa” and all pressures disclosed herein are absolute.

As used herein, the term “immiscible” can describe substances of the same phase or state of matter that cannot be uniformly mixed or blended. As an example, such immiscible mixtures can include liquids such as oil and water, or caustic, such as a water solution of sodium hydroxide, and hydrocarbon.

As used herein, the term “cross-sectional” may refer to a view of only a slice or portion of a component or apparatus without depicting underlying elements.

As depicted, process flow lines in the figures can be referred to interchangeably as, e.g., lines, pipes, liquids, feeds, products, or streams.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an exemplary vessel.

FIG. 2 is an elevational, cross-sectional view of the exemplary vessel.

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view along lines 3-3 of FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 is an enlarged, cross-sectional view of an exemplary vortex contactor.

FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of a slice of an exemplary swirler.

FIG. 6 is an enlarged view of a portion of the slice of the exemplary swirler of FIG. 5.

FIG. 7 is an elevational, cross-sectional view of another exemplary vessel.

FIG. 8 is an elevational, cross-sectional view of yet another exemplary vessel.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The embodiments disclosed herein can employ a vortex contactor for mass transferring a solute between two immiscible liquids. Generally, the vortex contactor performs the liquid-liquid extraction and the primary phase separation of the two liquids by using centrifugal force. Additionally, the embodiments can employ a metal mesh, a hydrophobic mesh, a hydrophilic mesh, one or more metal wires, steel wool, one or more vanes, one or more glass fibers, sand, a coalescing media including one or particulates, or any combination thereof to provide fine separation of caustic from hydrocarbon.

Referring to FIGS. 1-2, an exemplary vessel 100 can include a substantially cylindrical shell 104 having a first end 120, a second end 140, a top 160, and a bottom 170, and

5

orientated substantially horizontally. The substantially cylindrical shell **104** can surround an interior volume **108** with other elements, as described hereinafter, contained therein. Generally, the first end **120** can form a first dome **122** providing a first inlet **126** for a first liquid **128**, often a hydrocarbon stream including one or more sulfur compounds, and a second inlet **132** can receive a second liquid **134**, often an alkaline liquid or stream. Generally, the first liquid **128** and the second liquid **134** are provided through respective pipes **130** and **138**. The second end **140** can form a second dome **142**. Generally, the domes **122** and **142** are semi-hemispherical that provide rounded ends to the vessel **100**, although the first and second ends **120** and **140** can take other forms, such as flanges. The vessel **100** and other associated equipment can be made from any suitable material, such as carbon steel. Desirably, the contacting of the hydrocarbon liquid and alkaline liquid is co-current, although in other embodiments the contacting may be counter-current.

The vessel **100** as disclosed herein can facilitate the extraction of a component from two immiscible liquids. Although densities may be similar, one liquid is typically heavier than the other. Usually, the first liquid **128** can be lighter and less dense and the second liquid **134** may be heavier and denser. Often, the first liquid **128** can be at least one hydrocarbon, such as a liquefied petroleum gas having one or more C1-C5 hydrocarbons or a naphtha having one or more C5-C12 hydrocarbons; and the second liquid **134** can be an alkaline solution thereof, such as a sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide aqueous solution. Generally, the first liquid **128** contains a substance to be extracted and/or reacted, such as one or more sulfur compounds, e.g., one or more thiol compounds. Often, the substance is extracted from the hydrocarbon liquid into an alkaline solution. Examples can include contacting a liquefied petroleum gas containing one or more sulfur compounds and a solution of sodium hydroxide. Such exemplary extraction processes are disclosed in, e.g., U.S. Pat. Nos. 7,326,333 and 8,028,975.

Typically, the first liquid **128** includes up to about 10,000 ppm, preferably no more than about 1,000 ppm, by weight, sulfur in one or more thiol compounds based on the weight of the first liquid **128**. Often, the first liquid **128** contains sulfur compounds in the form of one or more thiol compounds and/or hydrogen sulfide as well as carbonyl sulfide, one or more sulfides, and carbon disulfide. Usually, the hydrogen sulfide and the one or more thiol compounds are extracted or removable from the first liquid **128** in the vessel **100**. The first liquid **128** may be provided at a first stage at the first end **120**.

Generally, the first liquid **128** is combined with the second liquid **134**, which can be a caustic, such as an aqueous solution of caustic soda, e.g., sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide. The aqueous solution can include about 1-about 30%, by weight, of the alkaline material, e.g., caustic. Such alkaline aqueous solutions are disclosed in, e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 7,326,333. In co-current processing, the second liquid **134** can be provided to the first stage, namely the first end **120** of the vessel **100**.

The top **160** can provide a first outlet **164** communicating with a pipe **166** for a hydrocarbon product **168**, and the bottom **170** can provide a second outlet **174** communicating with a pipe **172** for an alkaline liquid **178**. The vessel **100** can form a middle **180** approximately in the center of the cylindrical portion of the shell **104**.

The vessel **100** and the shell **104** can contain an inlet manifold **136**, a plurality of vortex contactors **200**, a

6

coalescer **290**, and an outlet collector manifold **320**. Alternatively, each vortex contactor **200** may have a separate conduit to convey liquid instead of the outlet collector manifold **320**. The plurality of vortex contactors **200** can be coupled to the shell **104** and each other by supports **202**. The coalescer **290** can include a metal mesh, which may be coated, one or more metal wires, steel wool, one or more vanes, one or more glass fibers, sand, a coalescing media including one or particulates, or any combination. The coalescer **290** may provide additional, finer separation between the two immiscible liquids, although the bulk of the separation may occur upstream. Generally, the inlet manifold **136** can communicate with the second inlet **132** to provide the second liquid **134** to the plurality of vortex contactors **200**. The first inlet **126** can provide the hydrocarbon first liquid **128** into an interior volume **108** at the first end **120**.

Referring to FIGS. 2-5, the plurality of vortex contactors **200** can include four vortex contactors, namely a first vortex contactor **210**, a second vortex contactor **260**, a third vortex contactor **262**, and a fourth vortex contactor **264**, although any suitable number of vortex contactors may be used. Moreover, each vortex contactor can be substantially similar to the others. As a consequence, only the first vortex contactor **210** will be described in further detail herein. The vortex contactors can be substantially similar, and examples of vortex contactors are disclosed in, e.g., U.S. application Ser. Nos. 13/709,329 and 13/709,376, both by Kuzmin et al., filed herewith, which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

The first vortex contactor **210** can include at least one wall **214**, often being substantially cylindrical and formed about a center **212**, creating a perimeter **218** about an interior space or vortex zone **222**. The at least one wall **214** can form a plurality of passageways **236**, such as a passageway **238**, for facilitating the transport of liquid therethrough. Particularly, the at least one wall **214** may form a conduit for the first liquid **128** to travel through the vortex contactor **210** to a swirler **240**. This portion of the at least one wall **214**, which can be substantially ring shaped, can be considered the swirler **240** in some exemplary embodiments. Generally, the swirler **240** can be a separate component formed integrally with the at least one wall **214**, be formed by the at least one wall **214**, or be provided as a separate component coupled to the at least one wall **214**.

Referring to FIGS. 4-6, the swirler **240** can be formed proximate to the perimeter **218** of the interior space **222** and reside upstream of the frustum **280**. Generally, the at least one wall **214** can form a circular channel about an exterior or a periphery **244** of the swirler **240** to allow the first liquid **128** to flow into each passageway **238**. In this exemplary embodiment of FIG. 5, four exemplary passageways **238** are depicted, but any suitable number of passageways **238** may be formed in the swirler **240**.

Often, the swirler **240** can impart a rotational motion to the first liquid **128** passing from the exterior or periphery **244** to the inner surface **246** of the swirler **240** to form a vortex. The swirler **240** can communicate at high pressure the first liquid **128** to the vortex zone **222** at an angular acceleration of about 1-about 200 g, preferably about 1-about 60, and more preferably about 10-about 60 g. The g-force can vary depending on the location, and may be lower in the vortex zone **222**. Usually, the swirler **240** can form a plurality **236** of passageways **238** where each passageway **238** can taper from the periphery **244** to the inner surface **246**.

7

Each passageway **238** can be defined by a first side **228** spaced apart from a second side **232** that tapers each passageway **238** to form a slot **248**. Thus, a swirl can be imparted from the first liquid **128** passing into each passageway **238** and exiting a respective slot **248** formed in the inner surface **246** of the swirler **240**.

Alternatively, the first side **228** can form vanes at an angle of about 90°-about 180° with respect to one another that can further taper the passageway **238**. As an aside, each side **228** and **232** can, independently, be considered a vane. The tapering of the passageway **238** can facilitate accelerating and imparting a circular motion to the first liquid **128**. The sides **228** and **232** can be formed integrally with the swirler **240**, or formed as separate components and coupled together to at least partially include the swirler **240**.

The first vortex contactor **210** can also include a frustum **280**, preferably funnical, positioned below the passageway or downstream of the passageway **238** and abutting the at least one wall **214** for facilitating the contacting of the first and second liquids. Although not wanting to be bound by theory, the rotational movement of the liquids can be accelerated by means of a curved internal structure that may enable the heavier phase to move rapidly toward the vortex contactor walls. Moreover, the frustum can maintain the stability of the vortex and minimize fluctuation of pressure and flow. The curved internal structure may include the funnical frustum **280**, preferably parabolic, that may abut the internal wall and taper the inner radius of the at least one wall **214**.

The funnical frustum **280** can be positioned proximate and downstream to the swirler **240** and abut the at least one wall **214**. It should be understood that the at least one wall **214** and the funnical frustum **280** can be formed as separate pieces and coupled together, or formed integrally together. The funnical frustum **280** can form a curvature for facilitating the formation of a vortex. At least a portion of its curvature can resemble a parabola. Although a parabolic profile is depicted other suitable profiles can include a rectangular, a conical, or a concave profile. Generally, the cross-section of the funnical frustum **280** can resemble any suitable bell curve.

Generally, the first liquid **128** can be provided to the passageway **238**, which may be communicated to the vortex zone **222**. The second liquid **134** can be provided from the inlet manifold **136** to the vortex zone **222** of the first vortex contactor **210**. The inlet manifold **136** can terminate as an open pipe or in any suitable flow distribution device, such as a spray nozzle or a distribution ring. The first liquid **128** exiting the passageway can be at a sufficient force, such as about 1-about 200 g, from the passageway **238** to impart a rotational motion to result in the second liquid **134** becoming dispersed within the first liquid **128**. The second liquid **134**, being denser, can recede to the perimeter **218** of the first vortex contactor **210** due to the centrifugal force and exit via an outlet collector manifold **320**. The contacting of the first and second liquids **128** and **134** can extract one or more sulfur compounds from the first liquid **128** into the second liquid **134**. The lighter first liquid **128** can be directed by the funnical frustum **280** to the center **222** of the first vortex contactor **210** and exit via a passageway **284** downstream of the funnical frustum **280**.

As shown in FIG. 2, the first liquid **128** can then enter the interior volume **108** while the second liquid **134** can be directed by the outlet manifold **320** via a pipe **324** to the bottom **170** of the shell **104**. Generally, the first liquid **128** being lighter and less dense can pass through the coalescer **290** that can coalesce any fine droplets of the second liquid

8

134 into larger droplets and fall to the bottom **170** of the shell **104**. What is more, the first liquid **128** and the second liquid **134** could begin to separate upstream of the coalescer **290**. However, upon contacting the coalescer **290**, droplets of the second liquid dispersed within the first liquid **128** can coalesce into larger droplets, and fall to the bottom **170** of the vessel **100**. The coalescer **290** can be positioned near the middle **180** of the vessel **100**.

Downstream of the coalescer **290**, the shell **104** can contain the first liquid **128** forming a first hydrocarbon phase and the second liquid **134** forming a second alkaline phase. Generally, the second phase passes through the second outlet **174** as an alkaline liquid **178** via the pipe **172**. The first liquid **128** can exit the first outlet **164** via the pipe **166** as a hydrocarbon product **168** that generally includes about 1-about 10 ppm, preferably no more than about 1 ppm, by weight, of, independently, a cation such as sodium associated with the alkaline liquid, and one or more sulfur compounds. However, it should be understood that several vessels **100** can be used in series so the hydrocarbon effluent exiting the last vessel can ensure that no more than about 1 ppm, by weight, of, independently, the cation and one or more sulfur compounds can be present in the hydrocarbon product **168**.

Referring to FIG. 7, another version of the vessel **100** is depicted. Elements of the vessel **100** in FIG. 7 with the same elements as in FIG. 1 may have the same respective reference numerals as in FIG. 1, even if the elements are depicted with different shapes. The vessel **100** can include a second inlet manifold **436**, a second plurality of vortex contactors **270**, a second outlet collector manifold **520**, a pipe **524**, and a second coalescer **490**, which can have structures at the opposing second end **140** mirroring structures at the first end **120**. The second plurality of vortex contactors **270** can include four vortex contactors, although only a fifth vortex contactor **272** and a sixth vortex contactor **274** are depicted in FIG. 7. The plurality of vortex contactors **270** can be substantially similar as the plurality of vortex contactors **200**, as discussed above. Moreover, the plurality of vortex contactors **270** can be coupled to the shell **104** and each other by supports **402**. Additionally, the vessel **100** can include a third inlet **146** and a fourth inlet **152** positioned at the second end **140**. Generally, the first liquid **128** can be provided by a pipe **148** from the third inlet **146**, and the second liquid **134** can be provided by a pipe **154** from the fourth inlet **152**.

The first liquid **128** can be provided to the interior volume **108** within the shell **104** at the second end **140** while the second liquid **134** can be provided via the fourth inlet **152** to a second inlet manifold **436**. Generally, the second outlet collector manifold **520** communicates the second liquid **134** via a pipe **524** to the bottom **170** of the vessel **100**. During contacting, one or more sulfur compounds can be extracted from the first liquid **128** into the second liquid **134**. Thus, the first liquid **128** downstream of the coalescers **290** and **490** can collect in the middle **180** of the vessel **100**. This downstream first liquid **128** can separate into a first or lighter phase often containing the hydrocarbon liquid while the heavier or second liquid **134** may form a second phase and collect near the bottom **170** of the vessel **100**. The first liquid **128** may exit the first outlet **164** at the top **160** of the vessel **100** as a hydrocarbon product, having the amount of cation and sulfur present as described above, while the denser second liquid **134** can exit the second outlet **174** as a spent alkaline liquid **178**. Both the first outlet **164** and the second outlet **174** can be proximate to the middle **180** of the vessel **100**.

Referring to FIG. 8, another version of the exemplary vessel **100** is depicted. Elements of the vessel **100** in FIG. 7 with the same elements as in FIG. 1 may have the same respective reference numerals as in FIG. 1, even if the elements are depicted with different shapes.

In this exemplary embodiment, the shell **104** can contain and be configured substantially the same as the vessel **100** depicted in FIG. 7. However, a partition or wall **570** is provided to fluidly separate the first end **120** from the second end **140** to provide counter-current contacting of hydrocarbons and alkaline. In addition, additional outlets are provided, namely a third outlet **534** and a fourth outlet **544** communicating with respective pipes **536** and **546**.

Generally, a sulfur-rich liquid **128**, such as a hydrocarbon, e.g., liquefied petroleum gas, enters the first inlet **126** and passes through the plurality of vortex contactors **210** and the coalescer **290** to exit third outlet **534** as an intermediate first liquid **538**. This intermediate first liquid **538** can be provided to the third inlet **146** at the second end **140**. Meanwhile, the second liquid **134**, such as a lean alkaline stream, is provided to the fourth inlet **152** at the second end **140**. Often, as the second liquid **134** passes through the second plurality of vortex contactors **270**, similarly as described above, and through the pipe **524** to the bottom **170** of the shell **104**, to form a partially spent liquid **134** as a second phase and a lighter first liquid **128** as first phase. This alkaline liquid can exit the fourth outlet **544** as an intermediate second liquid **554** and be provided to a pump **560**. The pump **560** can transfer the intermediate second liquid **554** to the second inlet **132** to pass through the plurality of vortex contactors **210** via the pipe **324**. The alkaline liquid **134** can collect in the bottom **170** of the shell **104** as an alkaline phase **134**. This alkaline second liquid **134** at least partially or fully saturated with one or more sulfur compounds can then exit the second outlet **174** as a sulfur-rich alkaline liquid **178**.

Returning to the second end **140** with the intermediate first liquid **538** provided to the third inlet **146**, this intermediate first liquid **538** can pass through the plurality of vortex contactors **270** and through the coalescer **490**. After passing through the coalescer **490**, the intermediate first liquid **538** may further separate as a lighter, hydrocarbon phase and exit the first outlet **164** as a hydrocarbon product **168**, which can include, independently, about 1-about 10 ppm, preferably no more than about 1 ppm, by weight, of the cation and one or more sulfur compounds, as described above.

Generally, the vessel **100** has a suitable length to allow the coalescing of the second liquid **134** that was dispersed by the plurality of vortex contactors **200** into the first liquid **128** and the sulfur compounds in the first liquid can be transferred to the second liquid **134** during this contacting in the plurality of vortex contactors **200** and then subsequent separation in the shell **104**. The versions of the vessel **100** disclosed herein can provide one or two stages of contacting. Particularly, with respect to the vessel **100** disclosed in FIG. 8, it can provide two stages of counter-current contacting, while the versions of the vessel depicted in FIGS. 1 and 7 may provide a single contacting stage. Although one or two stages are disclosed, it should be understood that more than two stages may be utilized, such as arranging several vessels in series.

Without further elaboration, it is believed that one skilled in the art can, using the preceding description, utilize the present invention to its fullest extent. The preceding preferred specific embodiments are, therefore, to be construed as merely illustrative, and not limitative of the remainder of the disclosure in any way whatsoever.

In the foregoing, all temperatures are set forth in degrees Celsius and, all parts and percentages are by weight, unless otherwise indicated.

From the foregoing description, one skilled in the art can easily ascertain the essential characteristics of this invention and, without departing from the spirit and scope thereof, can make various changes and modifications of the invention to adapt it to various usages and conditions.

The invention claimed is:

1. A process for removing one or more sulfur compounds from a first liquid comprising a contaminant said process comprising:

A) passing the first liquid through a first inlet and a second liquid through a second inlet of a vessel, wherein the vessel further comprises:

1) a plurality of vortex contactors, wherein the plurality of vortex contactors comprises at least a first and a second vortex contactor, each vortex contactor in turn comprising:

a) at least one wall forming a perimeter about an interior space and comprising a first side and a second side forming a passageway communicating the first liquid from an exterior to the interior space; and

b) a frustum positioned proximate to the passageway and abutting the at least one wall for facilitating contacting of the first and second liquids to extract the one or more sulfur compounds from the first liquid to the second liquid; and

2) a first outlet and a second outlet;

B) passing the first and second liquids through the passageways of the plurality of vortex contactors;

C) passing the first and second liquids from the plurality of vortex contactors through a coalescer thereby forming a contaminate-depleted liquid and a contaminate-enriched liquid; and

D) passing the contaminate-depleted liquid through the first outlet and the contaminate-enriched liquid through the second outlet.

2. The process according to claim 1, wherein the frustum comprises a funnical frustum to facilitate formation of a vortex in the passageways.

3. The process according to claim 1, wherein the vessel is substantially cylindrical and orientated horizontally.

4. The process according to claim 3, wherein the vessel further comprises a first end and a second end, a top, and a bottom, wherein the first and second inlets are formed at the first end and the first outlet is at the top and the second outlet is at the bottom of the vessel.

5. The process according to claim 4, further comprising passing the first liquid to a third inlet and passing the second liquid to a fourth inlet at the second end of the vessel wherein the first and second outlets are proximate to a middle of the vessel.

6. The process according to claim 1, wherein the coalescer further comprises at least one of a metal mesh, a hydrophobic mesh, a hydrophilic mesh, one or more metal wires, steel wool, one or more vanes, one or more glass fibers, sand, and a coalescing media including one or particulates.

7. The process according to claim 1, wherein the first liquid is a hydrocarbon liquid and the second liquid is an alkaline liquid and wherein the first and second liquids downstream of the coalescer form a first phase and a second phase, wherein the first phase substantially comprises the contaminant-depleted hydrocarbon liquid and the second phase substantially comprises the contaminate-enriched alkaline liquid.

11

8. The process according to claim 7, wherein the first liquid is a hydrocarbon liquid and the second liquid is an alkaline liquid and wherein the contaminant-depleted liquid comprises no more than about 10 ppm, by weight, of the alkaline liquid.

5

9. The process according to claim 1, further comprising communicating the second liquid to an inlet manifold for providing the second liquid to respective vortex contactors.

10. The process according to claim 9, further comprising communicating the contacted second liquid to an outlet collector manifold from the respective vortex contactors wherein the outlet collector manifold is coupled to a pipe for providing the contacted second liquid proximate to a bottom of the vessel.

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12